THE CHURCH OF TOMORROW

by Clifford P. Morehouse

A NATIONAL GUILD OF CHURCHMEN TRACT

First Printing

1969

Printed in the United States of America
by Commercial Offset Printers, Inc.

THE CHURCH OF TOMORROW

When we try to look at the Church of Tomorrow, we can see it only as "through a glass, darkly." Of one thing we may be sure: it will be as different from today's Church as today's is from yesterday's. Yet if it is to be truly the Church of God, and of our Lord Jesus Christ, it must be one with the Church of the ages. The central faith of the Christian revelation does not change, however differently it may be presented in any given generation. "Tomorrow's Church must continue to be the Church of all places and all ages" — in short, the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church of the Bible and the Creeds. It must be "like the scribe instructed in the Kingdom of God, of whom Jesus spoke, who can bring out of his treasure things new and old." (1) We are living in an era of great and rapid changes — in religion no less than in technology, social customs, and world relations. The world is smaller, and at the same time more terrifying, than ever before. And we live in a generation gap greater than any that ever separated us from our fathers, or our fathers from theirs. Today there is greater difference of outlook between an old Episcopalian (for example) and a young Episcopalian, than between a young Episcopalian and a young Methodist, or Roman Catholic, or even a young secularist. And perhaps this is basically a good thing, in a long-range view.

The younger generation is a generation of rebels, in many ways — but of surprising conservatism in others. Young people are largely in rebellion against constituted authority — whether in the university, the world, or the Church. They do not subscribe to the doctrine: "As it was in the beginning, is

now, and ever shall be; world without end, Amen." They not only don't believe that the world is without end; they have an uncomfortable feeling that the end of the world may come within their own lifetime. In this, perhaps, they are not so different from the first generation of Christians, who expected the imminent Second Coming of our Lord — except that it is not the coming of the Lord in power and great glory that they expect, but the coming of the Big Mushroom in overwhelming death and destruction that they anticipate and fear.

One manifestation of this anticipation is their rejection, to a considerable extent, of material values, and the ideal of financial success and prestige. As Dr. Seymour L. Halleck, professor of psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin, observes: "The most striking change in student value systems is in the direction of values which lead to immediate gratification. Students today have little reverence for the past and little hope for the future. They are trying to live in the present." (2) But if this leads to a depreciation respecting material achievement, it does not necessarily involve a depreciation in respect for human values — and this is the conservative and hopeful aspect. Dr. Halleck continues: "As reverence for property has diminished, youth have come to value the intrinsic worth of human relationships. There is an emphasis on being rather than doing. Youth are preoccupied with the need for being good people who can form good relationships. Whether they are more capable than their parents of finding such relationships is debatable, but their commitment to the search for intimacy is indisputable. A 'beautiful' person, in the varnacular of today's youth, is not one who is physically attractive or one

who has the personal qualities that guarantee success. He is an individual who has the capacity to relate openly and warmly with others." (3) Is not this capacity to relate warmly to each other, deespite its manifestation often in exotic terms of "flower power" or "love beads," basically a reflection of the love that is so central to Christianity? Is it not at least a symptom of the kind of humanism that is akin to true religion? Theodore Roszak, a keen observer in the field of social sciences, contends: "The dissenting young have indeed got religion. It is not the brand of religion that Billy Graham or William Buckly would choose for youth's crusade, but nonetheless it is religion. What began with Zen has now rapidly, perhaps too rapidly, proliferated into a phantasmagoria of exotic religiosity." (4)

But must the religion of the young shingle off into the fog of sentimental self-centered anti-dogmatic dogmatism? Must it be characterized by drugs and sex and other forms of escapism? Is it not as capable of Christianization as the pagan and materialistic religions of ancient Greece and Rome, among which Christianity had its birth? Surely the situation is not unlike that which inspired one of St. Paul's greatest sermons: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship. I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown God.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it. being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man." (5)

The interest of a large and diverse segment of youth in the deliberations of the World

Council of Churches, and in the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, certainly indicates that many of today's young people are not yet ready to declare the death of God, nor even to write off the institutional Church. They are, not without justification, impatient with its slowness of deliberation, its encrusted conservatism, its timidity in venturing into new fields, its hesitancy of approach to unity in faith and action; but they are not yet ready to abandon ship. In their own way of over-simplification, they are confident that if only the younger generation could achieve instant leadership in the councils of the Church, Christianity could be reborn in its antiquated courts and councils. We may reserve to ourselves some scepticism as to the efficacy of this remedy; but we shall ignore the claims of youth at our own peril and at the risk of alienating young people from the eternal truths of the Gospel itself — a Gospel that is as relevant to the world of the hydrogen bomb and the exploration of the moon as it was to that of the decaying but still powerful Roman Empire. Other young people seem lost to the Church — because they see in it no relevance to their own needs, hopes and fears, their own vision of the future. Shall we not make a genuine effort to reach them with the good news of the faith which alone can make truly free?

After all, these rebellious young people are the world of tomorrow and, if they be not lost to Christianity, the Church of tomorrow also. From them will come the communicants, the board members, the wardens and vestrymen (and women), the priests and bishops, and the executive secretaries of tomorrow's Church. From them will come both the saints and the sinners of tomorrow. They are, in short, even now the vanguard of the

People of God. Thus it behooves us to meet them where they are, to teach them as we can, to learn from and listen to them, and to open up to them the treasures of the Faith revealed to each generation by the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The gospels are **their** good news, the epistles are letters to **them,** and the Acts of the Apostles are the prototype of the works **they** are called to perform.

The older generation are not the trustees of stylized ritual and formal ceremonies to be handed down unchanged from one generation to the next. True, we have the duty to maintain the Faith once delivered to the saints, to witness to its integrity and great power; above all, to **live** our religion as befits followers of him who declared himself to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We stand truly in the tradition of the Church, as a living link between the past and the future, between time and eternity. But it is no part of God's call to his followers that they make over all men in their own image; but rather that they work with him in the creation and re-creation of all men in the image of God. He who could raise up sons of Abraham from lifeless stones can take care of the maintenance of his household of Faith in every age among his people, for whom he lived, died, and rose again, and with whom he promised to be to the end of time. We may be sure that the younger generation, however rebellious they may seem, will prove to be part of God's plan for the renewal of his Church. Perhaps their very scepticism, their disillusionment with things as they are, will turn out to be an essential element in that plan. Also, as they grow older they will become more conservative; it won't be many years before they begin to wonder why

their own children are so different, so difficult for them to understand!

If renewal is to be the key to the Church of tomorrow, it must begin with the clergy, and in the seminaries where future clergymen are trained for ordination. What should the priest of tomorrow's Church be like? What should be the priorities in his training and education? And are our seminaries today meeting these priorities? The first priority, in my opinion, is that he be a man of God — a man called and sent by God, ordained to preach the Gospel, to administer the sacraments, and to win men to Christ. This is, I admit, an old-fashioned concept, not popular in some "liberal" circles or in some of our seminaries; but I believe it to be absolutely vital. Just as Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, so the rector is the head of the particular congregation of the Church over which he presidees. He represents among us the Lord of life; he intercedes for us on earth as our Lord intercedes for us in heaven.

Second, closely related to and indeed flowing out of his nature as a man of God, we should expect him to be a man of prayer. To be sure, every Christian should be a praying person; but the priest is called to a life of prayer, not only in the public worship of the Church but in the privacy of his oratory or study, in the homes of his people, at the bedside of the sick and dying — a prayer for all men, and especially for those among whom he is called to serve. Third, we should expect him to teach the faith in season and out, not only in the pulpit but in the witness of his life — and to teach the hard facts of Christian faith and practice as well as the consoling ones. The hardest fact of the Christian life is sin, particularly our own sins. We

must expect him in his teaching, preaching, and personal ministrations to remind us that we are sinners, and also that our Lord, who died for our sins, has shown us the way of contrition, confession, forgiveness, and amendment of life.

Only if a man meets these essential qualifications, which reflect the holiness that is the Keystone of the Church at its best (and indeed one of the four "marks" of the Church in which we profess belief in the Creeds) — only then is he qualified to undertake the hard work of the ministry. Only then has he the right to expect lay people, young and old, within and without the Church, to respond to his leadership. For what shall it profit a man if he desegregate a community or walk a picket line, if he lose his own soul, and the souls of those committed to his care? But are these the qualities that are being instilled in our theological schools? Are they characteristics of the "new breed" of ministers, many of them so obsessed with "social action" and "situation ethics" that they sometimes seem scarcely to know right from wrong? One recent graduate, after discussing his fellow-students' experiments with sex and drugs, their preoccupation with sit-ins, love-ins, be-ins, and anything that is currently "in," raises the question whether today's candidates and newly-ordained ministers are "the Church's best hope or a secular corruption." (6) I answer that, corrupt or not, they **are** the Church's best hope, because on them rests the responsibility for leadership of the people of God in the next generation, I wish I had more confidence that today's seminaries are really training them for tomorrow's responsibilities.

But the world will never be won to Christ

by the actions of his ordained ministers alone. The laity also have their call to work and pray and give for the spread of Christ's Kingdom. They are not supposed to be the end product of Christianity, but rather its cutting edge — the people of God who can infiltrate the world of business and labor and the professions as no priest or minister can do. It was Archbishop William Temple, that great advocate of effective social action, who said, "The priest stands for God before the congregation; the congregation stands for God before the world." Tomorrow's layman, like today's, must take seriously his call to participate in carrying out the Divine Commission that both clergy and laity share. We have to get away from the idea that "Church work" consists of wearing a carnation and taking up the collection on Sunday, or even helping the minister in some of his priestly functions — though the laity should have a really significant part in the Sunday worship service. This is one of the insights that have come from the liturgical movement — a treasure both old and new. But laymen do not want to be mini-ministers, nor should they be expected to be. They are the laos, the people of God. Their real work is outside the church building, in the world in which they work and play, in which they live and love, succeed or fail, for the world of the marketplace is their parish. So if the Church of tomorrow is to be truly renewed, it must recover the note of holiness and mission, the sense that all are members of the one Body of Christ, with different functions but with a common purpose and goal, and a common source of strength in the word and sacraments.

I have spoken first of the holiness of the Church because it is the most neglected of

the four marks of the Church — One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. But equally important is the one-ness, the unity of the Church. To many of us it seems strange to profess, as we do in the creeds, that the Church is **one,** when so obviously it is divided into many communions, denominations, alleginces, or sects — call them what you will. Surely our Lord founded only one Church, and in his great high priestly prayer he prayed that his followers might all be one, even as he and the Father are one — and with the significant reason: "that the world may believe." Today we are **not** one, and the world does **not** believe. Could this perchance be the reason for the world's disbelief, or at least a considerable part of it? A basic call to the Church of tomorrow is to be more truly one, and to manifest that unity to the world. Thank God we are making progress toward that goal. The road ahead is a long one, with many twists and turns, and with tempting but treacherous apparent short cuts that may in fact lead to dead ends. We must constantly bear in mind that the only unity that we may properly seek is the unity of the Catholic and Apostolic Faith.

Nor should the Church rely soley upon its own resources in working together for the good of the community. John Cogley, eminent Roman Catholic lay theologian and journalist, noting the response of his Church to Pope John's call for **aggiornamento** (by which he meant literally bring the Church up to today), rightly observes that this process, in all Churches, "would acknowledge forthrightly the accomplishment of social forces other than religion, even though these forces may have been hostile to institutional religion. It would seek to adopt in its own synthesis lessons that were learned from secular ex-

perience. It would be more concerned about responding to the needs of modern men and their problems than about observing traditions that have become meaningless. It would aim to incorporate into a reinvigorated theology the insights produced by non-theological diciplines. The theologians of **aggiornamento** would seek to be relevant to their times and thereby knock down the barriers that separate theology from other branches of learning." (8)

Lest this be considered a secularization of religion, we need to remind ourselves that actually Christianity is, in its origin and much of its history, the most secular and materialistic of the great world religions. Buddhism, Confucianism, and many of the Oriental faiths, seek to escape from the material universe. They encourage passive acceptance of the inequalities and injustices of the world, and uphold "a spiritual withdrawal from the physical and social conditions of daily life, as the highest human goal." On the other hand, "Western religion upholds the supreme worth of striving to remake the world by active intervention." (9) What could be more secular than the plea in our Lord's prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread"? What could be more materialistic than the action of our Lord in taking a common loaf, the staff of life, and saying "This is my body", and wine' the common beverage of his day, and saying "This is my blood?" It is not the denial of the secular and the material, but its transmutation into the vehicle of divine and spiritual intervention that marks the Christian Faith. So, if tomorrow's Church is to be truly faithful to its Master, and to the best of its history, it must become at once more spiritual — that is, more truly committed — and at the same

time more material — that is, more concerned with the secular world. Yet its concern is not to accomodate itself to the secular world, but to bring to it the sense that it is God's world, and to draw it more closely into a reflection of the kingdom of God. Obviously, it cannot do that by saying that God is dead, or that he is unconcerned about humanity; but by proclaiming that God is gloriously alive, that he has revealed himself in his Son, Jesus Christ, that he continues to guide us in the power of his Holy Spirit; that he loves and cares for each individual, Christian or non-Christian, black or white, good or bad. Only of the Church continues to press this stupendous claim can it truly claim to be Catholic.

If the Church of tomorrow is to become more truly One, more truly Holy, and more truly Catholic, it must also become more truly Apostolic. We must place ourselves fully and squarely in the apostolic succession. I do not mean simply that we must continue the threefold ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons (though I firmly believe this), but rather that we should follow the example of the apostles and the early Christians in the utter devotion of their lives to Christianity — and this means that we of the laity, especially, need to give serious thought to the re-orientation of our faith, our practice, and our way of living. What was it that basically differentiated the early Christians from the pagan world around them? Simply that, having been baptized and having received the Holy Spirit, "they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (10) The Book of Acts goes on to tell how the early disciples carried out the teachings and commands of our Lord in the first century; our

call is no less than to do the same in the far different world of the late twentieth century. The times in which we live are very different; but people are much the same. And the imperatives, as recorded in the New Testament, are as valid (and as difficult) as they were two thousand years ago. It was never easy to be a truly committed Christian, and we should not expect it to be easy today.

For example: Jesus told his followers: Love God with all your heart and soul and mind. Is this easier or harder in today's urban ghetto than it was in pastoral Palestine? No matter; it's still the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. Maybe the reason so many moderns find it so hard to love our neighbors is that we don't really love and respect ourselves. Without self-respect, or personal integrity, how can we respect and love others? Then there are the more specific commands. Preach the Gospel. Baptize all nations. Pray without ceasing. Heal the sick. Feed the hungry. The simple, direct commands tumble over one another in the mind of anyone who knows the Bible. They have the same authority now that they had when they were issued. And the Bible is not lacking in examples of how the first disciples carried them out in a hostile and pagan world — a world in which Christ's teachings were a stumbling-block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Gentiles. We read them in the Book of Arts. We see them throughout history in the lives of the saints and heroes of Christianity — Francis the gentle, Thomas Becket the martyr, Hilda the teacher, Florence Nighingale the nurse, Luther the reformer, and his namesake, Martin Luther King, the apostle of non-violence, Pope John the updater — a host of men and women as numer-

ous as the stands on the shore or the stars in the universe.

Is all this just past history — a tale told of a winter's evening? Are the days of saints and heroes gone in this "practical" and "scientific" — but at the same time awesome and fear-ridden — day? Two of those I have mentioned are men of our own time; surely there are others in today's Church, and there will be more in the Church of tomorrow. Of course, it is obvious that our world is very different from that of the apostles and the early disciples. We must use new and different methods, if the Church is to make the same kind of impact on our technological and urban society that the disciples made on their era of hand labor and pastoral economy. We need new forms of ministry, some of which are beginning to function, and others now in the experimental stage or yet to be developed. And we need greater participation of the laity in our witness and ministry.

The essential thing about the ministry of the early disciples is that it was — to use a much-overworked word — "relevant" to their time and society; our ministry today and tomorrow must be relevant to ours. Unfortunately, for the past half-century the Church has been lagging in the adaptation of its ministry and witness, both clerical and lay; so that we have already lost large segments of our society, including notably the young, the poor, the victims of segregation, the workers, and — at the other end of the scale — many of the intellectuals, the technicians and scientists, the social actionists, and the self-satisfied middle class secularists. Is it too late for the Church to recover its lost ground, and to become again the potent factor in society that it was half a century ago? Per

haps it is later than we think. Certainly it is too late, if we are to continue our old leisurely methods, if we are content to serve as complacent occupants of comfortable pews. But I think is is not too late, if we recover the idea of a servant Church, filled with the Spirit-given concept of mission to the world as it is today.

Some theologians are fond of saying that we are living in a post-Christian era. If by that they mean that our Lord's teachings and the acts of the apostles and their successors are ancient history and have no relevance to our day and age, I do not agree. Methods and techniques must change in every age, but the essential faith of the Church and its divine commission to go into all the world to teach and preach the Gospel, to minister to the hearts and minds, bodies and souls, of all men — these things do not change. I prefer to think that we are in a pre-Christian era — perhaps on the verge of an age where the Church and the world will realize as never before our Lord's promise that his disciples shall do even greater acts in his name. "In the world you shall have tribulation," he said, "but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world." (11) This is the kind of work and witness to which I believe the Church of todav and tomorrow is called, and in which I believe the true apostolicity of the Church is to be found.

Therefore I can recite with confidence the words of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds that describe the Church, even when they seem to be in contradiction to the observable facts of the contemporary situation. I believe the Church is One, despite its obvious fragmentation; and that its unity will be increasingly manifested in the days to come. I

believe the Church is **Holy,** despite itsobvious shortcomings and the sinfulness of us who are its members; and that its holiness will be shown in the lives of its saints and heroes yet to be born. I believe that the Church is **Catholic,** despite its obvious differences and rivalries, between and across denominational lines; and that its catholicity will be increasingly revealed as Christians learn to work and pray together in carrying out together our common mission to the community, the nation, and the world. I believe that the Church is **Apostolic,** despite its feebleness in following the Acts of the Apostles; and that its apostolicity will be seen in the ways in which it learns to apply the universal words and examples of its Founder and his early disciples in a vastly different and rapidly changing society.

Despite the darkness of the present. I have faith in the future, and in the ability of the Church to cope with the world's problems, and to share in our Lord's words: "Be of good cheer, and fear not, for I have overcome the world."

NOTES

1. Peter Day: **Tomorrow's Church,** page 119. Seabury Press, New York, 1969.

2. Seymour L. Halleck: "Why They'd Rather Do Their Own Thing." Reprinted from **Think** by United Ministries in Higher Education, P. O. Box 7286, St. Louis, Mo., 63177.

3. Ibid.

4. Quoted by Myron D. Bloy in the **Church Review,** November, 1968: from an article by Theodore Roszak in the **Nation,** April 1, 1968.

5. Acts 17: 22-24.

6. Lewis S. Keizer, "Ministers: The New Breed," in the **Episcopalian,** November, 1968.

7. See my earlier leaflet in this series, "What About Christian Unity?"

8. John Cogley: **Religion in a Secular Age,** page 123. Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1968.

9. Cogley, **op. cit.,** page 12.

10. Acts 2:42.

11. St. John 16:33.

Please Print Names and Addresses of Episcopalians for Our Mailing List

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Please Print Names and Addresses of Episcopalians for Our Mailing List

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Please Print Names and Addresses of Episcopalians for Our Mailing List

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Name .....

Address .....

City .....

Every communicant has an opportunity to help make this work more effective for Christ and His Church.

You can pray for God's blessing on our efforts.

You can send us names and addresses of Episcopalians.

You can enroll as a member. ANNUAL contribution $2 per year.

You can encourage others to become interested.

We pray you will.

NATIONAL GUILD OF CHURCHMEN, INC.
West Park, N. Y. 12493

THE NATIONAL GUILD OF CHURCHMEN

is an incorporated non-profit association of Episcopalians organized to maintain, defend and propagate the historic doctrine, practice and teaching of the Anglican Communion as held by the Episcopal Church and contained in the Book of Common Prayer.

Believing it is the duty of every member of the Episcopal Church to know the fundamental truths of the "faith which was once delivered unto the saints" the Guild has distributed more than 1,000,000 teaching tracts to over 200,000 communicants of the Church throughout the country.

A free copy of each available tract listed below will be mailed to anyone upon request.

.....copies "Monks, Nuns and Episcopalians"

.....copies "Eucharist and Morning Prayer"

.....copies "A Window on The New Morality"

.....copies "Strength From Prayer"

.....copies "The Living Sacraments"

.....copies "God The Holy Spirit"

.....copies "Confession: Act of Love"

.....copies "The Church"

.....copies "The Role of The Laity"

.....copies "Prayers for Tranquillity"

.....copies "What About Christian Unity"

.....copies "What is the National Guild?"

Single copies 10¢
100 copies $8. (may be assorted)

National Guild of Churchmen, Inc.
West Park, N. Y. 12493

Date _____

Please enroll me as a member of the National Guild of Churchmen. Enclosed is ANNUAL contribution of $2 for 19_____, also special contribution of _____ Dollars.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

Parish _____

Please Print

Special contributions are earnestly solicited to extend the work of the Guild. Please make checks payable to the National Guild of Churchmen, Inc.

60

ALL CONTRIBUTIONS ARE INCOME TAX DEDUCTIBLE.